

NETWORKS

FAQ

Q What is HSDPA, and what download speeds can it offer?

A High-Speed Downlink Packet Access (HSDPA) is a 3G technology designed specifically to speed up data downloads, and is often referred to as 3.5G. The download speed it offers depends on the network, but each improvement requires the entire network to be upgraded.

The technology can run at 1.8, 3.6, 7.2 and 14.4Mbit/s. Most mobile operators in the country currently offer a maximum of 3.6Mbit/s, but Vodafone is upgrading its network to 7.2Mbit/s (see review, right). Further speed increases are planned in the future. The network speeds are all theoretical and factors such as the quality of the modem, the distance from a base station and the number of users all affect your download speed.

Beyond HSDPA is Evolved Hi-Speed Packet Access (Evolved HSPA), which will provide data rates of up to 42Mbit/s. Networks are unlikely to adopt this technology until HSDPA has reached its limits, so don't expect to find devices that support it any time soon.

David Ludlow
Editor

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VODAFONE Mobile Broadband USB Modem 7.2

★★★★★

£58 inc VAT on £29 a month contract inc VAT
From www.vodafone.co.uk

Wireless hotspots are a brilliant and inexpensive way of getting online for fast downloads. While they're growing in number, though, hunting one down when you desperately need to send an important email can be a pain. If you want the flexibility to get online no matter where you are, Vodafone's Mobile Broadband USB Modem 7.2 can help. It uses HSDPA (see FAQ) to give you broadband-speed downloads wherever you are. The 7.2 in the product's name refers to the maximum download speed it supports: 7.2Mbit/s. This speed puts the service up against standard home broadband packages.

Before you get too excited, though, Vodafone has yet to update its entire network to support this new speed, so you won't currently get such performance everywhere in the country. Still, Vodafone is the only mobile company to offer a 7.2Mbit/s-capable modem at the moment; its competitors offer a maximum of just 3.6Mbit/s.

As with all wireless connections, the quoted maximum speed is usually quite a bit faster than the speeds you'll actually get when using the service. We tested our download speeds around London. In East London we managed only 515Kbit/s; from our Central London office we managed download speeds of 1,179Kbit/s. These speeds are in line with those of other 3G modems we've seen from other service providers. While they're not as quick as home broadband connections or wireless hotspots, these speeds are still good enough for heavy web and email use, although we wouldn't want to download anything huge such as a Windows service pack.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast downloads
- ✓ Excellent roaming charges
- ✗ More expensive than competitors

USB 3G ADAPTOR USB interface, SIM slot, requires Vodafone contract



If you stray out of a 3G area, the modem can downgrade itself to GPRS speeds, which will give you similar performance to that of a dial-up connection.

The USB Modem 7.2 is available on three contracts: 18-months, 12-months and pay as you go. The 18-month and 12-month contracts cost £29 a month and come with a 3GB per month fair usage policy. The only difference is that the modem costs £116 on the 12-month contract and £58 on the 18-month contract.

This service is a little more expensive than those offered by T-Mobile (£20 a month with a free modem) and 3 (£15 a month and £50 for the modem) with the same 3GB download limit. However, if you travel a lot, Vodafone's service suddenly looks much more attractive. When in Europe and, currently, the US, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, 24-hour unlimited downloads costs just £9.98, which is cheaper than the daily internet charges at many hotels. The pay-as-you go service is also very attractive for occasional UK users. The modem costs £141, but 24-hour access with a 500MB fair usage policy costs £9.98. This is great value for occasional use if you can afford the expensive modem cost.

T-Mobile and 3's services are better value for heavy UK users, but if you travel a lot or plan use it only occasionally, the Mobile Broadband USB Modem 7.2 is a good choice.

David Ludlow

Also consider...

D-LINK Rangebooster 1353

★★★★★

£93 inc VAT
From www.ebuyer.com

The Rangebooster 1353 is a Draft-N 2.0 wireless access point with a variety of different uses to suit a range of needs. You can use it as a simple access point to add wireless to an existing network, as a bridge to another wireless network or as a wireless repeater to boost the range of a network. With superb performance, it's an excellent and flexible access point.



WIRELESS ACCESS POINT/
BRIDGE DRAFT 802.11n, 10/100
Ethernet port
PART CODE DAP-1353/B
DETAILS www.dlink.co.uk
FULL REVIEW Feb 2008



FON La Fonera+

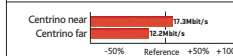
★★★★★

€43 (around £30 inc VAT)
From www.fon.com

La Fonera+ is no ordinary wireless router. When you use it, you become a 'Fonero' and get free WiFi access to other users' Fon hot spots (La Fonera+). The idea is that when you travel you get free hotspot access in return for sharing your broadband connection with other Foneros and, for a charge, ordinary people too. It's easy to set up, has private and public wireless networks to enable you to keep your own PCs safe, and the number of Fon Spots is growing.



WIRELESS ROUTER 802.11g
(54Mbit/s), 1x 10/100 Ethernet
port, WAN port
PART CODE FON2201A
DETAILS www.fon.com
FULL REVIEW Jan 2008



SOLWISE V500-DS

★★★★★

£70 inc VAT
From www.solwise.co.uk



Solwise's V500-DS is a DECT cordless phone. Its base station has a standard telephone socket for making normal calls over a landline, but it also has an Ethernet port to connect to your router, enabling you to make Skype calls without a PC.

We've seen phones like this before, including Philips' VOIP841 (see Also Consider..., below) and Netgear's SPH200D. While both of those products cost nearly £100, the V500-DS is comparatively cheap at just £70 and looks just as classy.

Setup couldn't be easier, and there's a helpful instruction manual in the unlikely event that you get stuck. Once the base station is plugged into a broadband connection and the phone has charged, it should receive an IP address automatically. You can also set one manually if you haven't got a DHCP server.

Setting up a Skype account is as simple as typing in your username and password, although the phone sometimes behaved strangely and wouldn't let us press a key enough times to bring up the letter we wanted. Instead, it locked up and put in a different character. This was a minor annoyance, but we soon had our account working.

The V500-DS displays all your Skype contacts and their online status, just like the desktop application. Selecting a contact to call is easy. You can use SkypeOut to make a regular landline call, too, although you'll need to have credits as you can't top your account up from the phone. Alternatively, you can dial out using your regular landline. The handset



can be set to use either Skype or your landline by default, or prompt every time you enter a number.

The main difference between this phone and its Philips and Netgear rivals is that it has a combined charging dock and base station, so it has to be placed within a cable's length of your router. The Philips and Netgear handsets have separate charging docks and base stations, so you can place the handset anywhere in your home. These phones also have 500-entry address books, compared with the V500-DS's 50-entry address book. These are only minor differences though, and unless you physically can't have the phone near your router or you want to store more telephone numbers, the V500-DS is a perfectly good phone.

Voice quality was great and we found little difference between landline and Skype calls.

However, the V500-DS doesn't sound as good as Philips' VOIP841, which is the clearest DECT Skype phone we've used. The VOIP841 is also a little more attractive and has more features, making it a better buy. That said, Solwise's V500-DS is excellent value and perfect for those on a tighter budget.

David Ludlow

SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent value
- ✓ High call quality
- ✗ Keys can be unresponsive

SKYPE PHONE Ethernet and landline connection, docking station, 50-entry address book, 120 hours' standby time, 8 hours' talk time
PART CODE VOIP-SKYPE-V500-DS
DETAILS www.solwise.co.uk

CHOOSING A... VoIP Provider

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

SERVICE TYPE: PC

COST PER MONTH: Free

FREE CALLS: Other users only

STANDARD TELEPHONE CALLS: From around 1p per minute

Recommended minimum in grey

1 You need to choose the kind of service that best suits your needs. An application with the minimum specifications listed above requires a computer in order to work. This means you can install it on a notebook and carry it around with you, which is handy for travellers. These applications are available from Skype, Microsoft, Tiscali and Tesco. If you're looking for a replacement home phone, you need to sign up for a fixed VoIP line instead, such as those provided by Vonage and BT.

2 With an application on your PC, you can see when your friends are online and make free phone calls to users of the same service anywhere in the world. If you want to call a traditional landline, you can use a service such as SkypeOut, but you'll need to buy credits. Call costs vary between countries, so check the current pricing and pick the service that provides you with the best deal. Calls to most developed countries should cost around 1p per minute.

If you want to receive phone calls, you'll need to buy a telephone number with Skypeln, for example. There is usually a monthly charge.

3 A fixed VoIP service works like a traditional phone. A basic service costs around £8 per month, but you get a telephone number and free UK landline calls. You also get free VoIP calls to any user of the same service, although it's hard to tell who uses which service as you just dial normal telephone numbers and they give no indication of the service to which they belong. Pick the service that best fits your needs; if you make a lot of foreign calls, you should go with the one that offers the cheapest calls to the countries you call most often.

4 A fixed VoIP service should come with a telephone adaptor so you can use your existing telephone and answerphone with it. Look for an adaptor that also connects to your existing telephone line, so your friends can still call you without having to learn a new number. Your old line is also useful as a backup and for making emergency calls.

D-LINK DHP-301

★★★★★

£88 inc VAT
From www.dabs.com



D-Link's HomePlug network adaptors use your power lines for network cables, so you can create a network without wiring your home. They're also good for those places where wireless refuses to work. These adaptors have a maximum speed of 200Mbit/s, although they actually run at a similar speed to Draft-N wireless networking. They're an excellent choice if you want simple networking.



POWERLINE NETWORKING
KIT Two 200Mbit/s HomePlug AV Ethernet adaptors
PART CODE DHP-301
DETAILS www.dlink.co.uk
FULL REVIEW Oct 2007



PHILIPS VOIP841

★★★★★

£95 inc VAT
From www.chillblastexpress.co.uk



Philips' VOIP841 DECT phone connects to your landline and broadband connection so that you can make regular and Skype calls without a PC. It's incredibly easy to configure, and works brilliantly. Call quality was the best we've ever had from a Skype phone, sounding just like a regular call. It's great if you want a flexible way to use Skype.



SKYPE PHONE Ethernet and landline connection, docking station, 500-entry address book, 120 hours' standby time, 12 hours' talk time
PART CODE VOIP841
DETAILS www.philips.com
FULL REVIEW Jun 2007